

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ACDA-12 IO-13 /073 W

-----107570 211544Z /53

O R 211437Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6871

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 0958

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: ROCKY ROAD TO PEACE: EPISODE SIX

REF: BEIRUT 0915

1. HAD BRIEF DISCUSSION OF SITUATION WITH FONMIN BOUTROS MORNING FEB. 21. HE SAID HE CONSIDERABLY LESS PESSIMISTIC THAN HE HAD BEEN IN RECENT PAST AND THAT HE TOUGHT THINGS NOTICEABLY CALMER IN RECENT DAYS. LEBANESE EXPECTED SYRIANS WOULD LIFT BLOCKADE OF FAYYADIYAH WITHIN NEXT 48 HOURS AND THAT THERE WOULD BE SOMETHING OF A DETENTE.

2. BOUTROS SAID ONE LEBANESE OFFICER (CAPTAIN ASHQAR) HAD BEEN ARRESTED FEB. 20. SYRIAN MEMBERS OF INVESTIGATING TEAM HAD RETURNED TO DAMASCUS FOR GUIDANCE AND INVESTIGATION WOULD RESUME TOMORROW, THE 22ND. SYRIANS WERE FOCUSSED FOR THE TIME BEING ON FAYYADIYAH INCIDENT. THERE HAD BEEN NO FURTHER PROGRESS ON THE FURN ASH-SHEBBAK CASE. IN
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SPITE OF PROMISES BY KATA'IB TO COOPERATE RE LATTER, THEY WERE STILL BEING DIFFICULT.

3. BOUTROS THOUGHT THAT RECENT INCIDENTS HAD HAD SOME BENEFICIAL EFFECT IN EDUCATING SYRIANS TO DELICACY OF LEBANESE SITUATION AND IMPORTANCE OF DEALING CAREFULLY WITH IT. HE HOPED THEY WOULD NOT GET TOO IMPATIENT WITH

THE LEBANESE LEGAL PROCESS. I SAID I WAS SURE THEY WOULD IF THINGS DRAGGED ON AS THEY NORMALLY DID IN LEBANESE COURTS. HE SAID MIXED COURT HAD BEEN GIVEN INSTRUCTIONS TO MOVE RAPIDLY. ON THE OTHER HAND, LEBANESE COULD NOT SIMPLY CONDEMN MAN IN 48 HOURS AS SYRIANS SEEMED TO WANT.

4. BOUTROS SAID EVENTS HAD HAD ANOTHER BENEFICIAL EFFECT FOR BOTH SIDES IN DEMONSTRATING THAT, FOR ALL ITS WEAKNESS, LEBANESE ARMY WAS STILL CAPABLE OF REACTING. I SAID AMBASSADOR MURPHY HAD MET WITH KHADDAM LAST WEEK AND ASKED LATTER ABOUT ALLEGED REMARK BY PRESIDENT ASSAD REGARDING LEBANESE ARMY. KHADDAM HAD SAID SYRIANS HAD IMPRESSION FROM LEBANESE LEADERS THAT THEY THEMSELVES WERE CONCERNED ABOUT STATE OF LEBANESE ARMY. BOUTROS SAID TRUE STORY WAS THAT ASSAD HAD ON TWO OCCASIONS TOLD BOUTROS HIMSELF THAT LEBANESE HAD NOT ASKED SYRIANS FOR ADVICE AND SYRIANS HAD NOT GIVEN IT, BUT THEY HAD THOUGHT BEST WAY TO PROCEED WOULD HAVE BEEN TO DISSOLVE LEBANESE ARMY AND START OVER FROM SCRATCH, BRINGING BACK INTO SERVICE ONLY THOSE OFFICERS WHO WERE "VALID", I.E., THOSE WHO WERE COMPETENT AND WHO COULD BE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT A UNIFIED LEBANESE ARMY. ASSAD HAD NOTED THAT LEBANESE HAD GONE ON THEIR OWN MISTAKEN WAY AND MADE IT CLEAR SYRIANS DISAPPROVED BUT HAD NO INTENTION OF INTERVENING.

5. I ASKED WHAT PROSPECTS WERE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION.
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BOUTROS SAID HE WAS HOPEFUL SOMETHING COULD BE WORKED OUT. THE PROCESS HAD BEEN COMPLICATED BY FACT IT NOW APPEARED CHAMOUN WOULD LIKE TO SERVE IN CABINET. THAT WAS SOMETHING THAT WOULD BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THERE WAS NOBODY ON THE OTHER SIDE WITH SUFFICIENT WEIGHT TO BALANCE CHAMOUN'S PRESENCE. I NOTED THAT IN THIS MORNING'S PRESS PIERRE GAMAYEL WAS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID IDEA OF A NEW CABINET WAS AN OPIATE AND WOULD NOT RESOLVE ANY OF THE PROBLEMS. BOUTROS LAUGHED AND SAID AMINE GEMAYEL, PIERRE'S SON AND FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE KATA'IB, COULD NOT WAIT TO GET INTO THE CABINET. (SARKIS AND BOUTROS ARE THINKING IN TERMS OF A YOUNGER CABINET WHICH WOULD EXCLUDE PEOPLE LIKE PIERRE GEMAYEL, CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND SULEIMAN FRANGIE BUT WOULD HAVE SOME OF THEIR SONS REPRESENTED IN IT.)

6. I ASKED BOUTROS WHETHER HE THOUGHT RENEWAL OF THE ADF MANDATE WAS GOING TO BE A PROBLEM GIVEN THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THERE COULD BE NO ARAB LEAGUE MEETING ON THE SUBJECT. BOUTROS SAID THIS WAS SOMETHING HE WAS GOING TO HAVE TO DISCUSS WITH KUWAITI AND UNITED ARAB EMIRATE AMBASSADORS AND WITH MAHMOUD RIAD. HE THOUGHT THAT PERHAPS THE ARAB LEAGUE SECRETARIAT COULD TAKE ACTION ON THIS WITHOUT

WAITING FOR THE ARAB LEAGUE TO MEET.
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